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RONALD SCHECHTER

Catinka Heinefetter

A Jewish Prima Donna in Nineteenth-Century France

On January 7, 1841, the poet, dramatist, and cultural critic Théophile Gautier reviewed a performance of *La Juive* (The Jewess) at the Paris Opera. Writing in *La Presse*, France's largest newspaper, he focused on the debut of Catinka Heinefetter in the lead role of Rachel. He began with "a physical portrait" of the twenty-one-year-old *prima donna*, lamenting that "[t]oday we do not attach much importance to the beauty of actresses", a category that included opera singers. Mademoiselle Heinefetter had "large, well-formed shoulders, a majestic figure", a slender waist, and ample bosom. "Her whole person had something robust and energetic about it." Gautier admired "her regular and beautiful features, her black eyebrows, her brilliant eyes, her straight nose", all of which produced "an effect" even at a distance. He was more circumspect about her hands, which were "rather beautiful, though somewhat big", and her feet, which he "suspect[ed] of being German", by which he seems to have meant overly large. He quipped that "throughout the opera we were diligently on the lookout" for the singer's feet "without succeeding in seeing them", and he believed that the length of her dress was at least in part designed to occlude them. Nevertheless, Gautier wrote, "Since Mademoiselle [Cornélie] Falcon, no one has represented the beautiful Jewess Rachel with a more satisfying and realistic physical appearance, and this for the excellent reason that Mademoiselle Heinefetter is a Jewess herself and very beautiful." Her coreligionists were proud of her: "Israelite applause was not lacking", as "[t]he twelve tribes had their representatives" at the opera, but Gautier insisted that "Christians mixed their bravos [with those of the Jews] at numerous points."

Only after describing Heinefetter's physical appearance and Jewishness did Gautier come to the matter of the singer's voice. He characterized it as "grand, skillful, remarkable above all in the high and low tones" but "less satisfying" in the middle range and overall "capricious and inconstant". In the first act Heinefetter was nervous, an understandable condition in one "who has never appeared in the theater before", but by the second act she had "conquer[ed] her fear" and sang "with much vigor and energy". Gautier also approved of her use of gesture, which in his view was more natural and believable than the hackneyed movements supposedly favored by declamation instructors.



Catinka Heinefetter, lithograph by Léon Noël after Franz Winterhalter. From: Bibliothèque nationale de France (via Gallica).

The critic ended his review with an account of the curtain call in which Heinefetter received “multitudes of bouquets”. Whereas a “shower of flowers” was becoming the norm for divas, in this case it was “a veritable downpour”. Alluding again to the singer’s Jewish heritage and supposed fan base, Gautier wrote that “all the lilies of Sharon and all the roses of Jericho had been requisitioned” for the occasion, adding, “At least Mademoiselle Heinefetter is a beautiful person, which makes this fanaticism more excusable.”¹

Was Catinka Heinefetter a “Jewess”? If so, how did her Jewishness affect her career? Were audience members attracted to Jewish women in opera, and if so, what cultural factors accounted for this attraction? To what extent did the administration of the Paris Opera take Jewish or reputedly Jewish origins into account when casting female singers in *La Juive* and other productions? How did the already suspect reputation of the stage (in opera as well as theater) affect the moral stature of women such as Heinefetter, in both the eyes of the general public and the Jewish community? Before addressing these questions directly, I would like to sketch the career of Catinka Heinefetter, with special attention to her brief tenure at the Paris Opera in the early 1840s.

Born on September 12, 1819 in Mainz, Catinka Heinefetter was one of six sisters who became singers. Her elder sisters Sabine and Clara were particularly renowned. Catinka debuted in Frankfurt in 1837 before moving to Paris, where she sang at the Opera in 1841 and 1842. Afterwards she appeared in Brussels, Hamburg, Berlin, Vienna, and Budapest. In addition to her role as Rachel in *La Juive*, she sang Norma (in the eponymous opera by Bellini), Agathe (in *Der Freischütz* by Carl Maria von Weber), and Valentine (in Meyerbeer’s *Les Huguenots*). She died young, at the age of 39, on December 20, 1858, only months after having retired.²

Apart from brief biographical entries in biographical dictionaries and music encyclopedias, little has been written about Catinka Heinefetter. But the Archives Nationales in Paris contain the personnel files of singers at the Académie Royale de la Musique (Royal Academy of Music), the institution in charge of the Opera. Among these is Heinefetter’s dossier, which consists of roughly thirty letters to, from, or concerning the singer from the summer of 1840 to the summer of 1842 and reveals much about the degree of control she had over her own life, her career, and the people who attempted to manage her. When combined with a few other sources, the Heinefetter file provides a rare glimpse

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1. Théophile Gautier, “Opéra: Début de mademoiselle Catinka Heinefetter”, *La Presse*, 7 January 1841, reprinted in *Histoire de l’art dramatique en France depuis vingt-cinq ans* (Leipzig, 1859), vol. 2, 90–91.
 2. *Pierer’s Universal-Lexikon* (Altenburg, 1859), s.v. “Heinefetter”; *Meyers Großes Konversations-Lexikon* (Leipzig, 1905–9), s.v. “Heinefetter, Sabine”; Stanley Sadie, ed., *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (New York: Grove, 2001), s.v. “Heinefetter”.

into the opportunities available to female Jewish performers in early to mid-nineteenth-century Europe.

Upon reading this file, one is immediately struck by Heinefetter's considerable bargaining power. The first item is the singer's contract covering the period of March 1841 to January 1843. Though undated, it appears to have been signed in late summer or early fall 1840. In addition to Catinka's signature, the contract bears that of her mother, Madame Seelandt, who served as guarantor and may have helped her daughter in her negotiations.³ After all, in 1836 the conductor Gaspare Spontini boasted to the King of Prussia that he had secured a contract with Clara Heinefetter "despite so many difficulties and obstinacies on the part of this singer and her mother".⁴ Whoever took the lead in the negotiations, the contract showed great expectations on the part of the Academy. It offered Heinefetter 16,000 francs for the first year and 20,000 for the second and included three months' vacation per year. (Opera singers often used their "vacations" to go on tour, and though this meant more work, it also provided additional income.) Payroll figures in the archives of the Paris Opera, which take into account the actual number of performances as well as negotiations made after the contracts were signed, show that for the 1840-41 season Heinefetter was paid 33,520 francs. She earned 18,000 in 1841-42, but during that period she took extended leaves.⁵ By comparison, according to the same payrolls, the conductor of the orchestra typically earned 8,000 francs per year, and musicians playing in the pit often earned 700 to 800 francs per year. Meanwhile, women working in the textile industry earned barely a franc per day.⁶

The most important theme to emerge in Heinefetter's personnel dossier is a struggle over control of the singer's schedule. Specifically, Heinefetter frequently requested more time to study her roles. On October 26, 1840, shortly before she was scheduled to debut as Rachel, Heinefetter wrote to the director of the Academy, Léon Pillet, to ask for an extension. She complained that her teachers had been absent for the previous two months and that she had not received the instruction necessary for a good performance. If the director insisted on focusing on "the letter" of an agreement that she had made with Henri Duponchel, the head of production at the Opera, this required her to be on stage "in the first days of November". She suggested that "the first week of this month [November] is part of the first days",

3. Catinka Heinefetter's contract with the Académie Royale de la Musique, "Heinefetter", AJ 13 194, Archives Nationales, Paris.

4. Alessandro Belardinelli, *Documenti Spontini inediti* (Florence: Edizioni Sansoni Antiquariato, 1955), vol. 2, 288. Cited in Susan Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 124.

5. Payrolls from the Académie Royale de la Musique, PE3(699), Archives de l'Opéra de Paris.

6. Gérard Noiriel, *Workers in French Society in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, trans. Helen McPhail (Providence RI: Berg, 1990), 18. Cf. Francis Demier, "Les ouvriers de Rouen parlent à un économiste en juillet 1848", *Le Mouvement social* 119 (April-June 1982): 3-31.

and asked for her first performance to take place on November 7.⁷ In November, however, she asked for an additional delay until the “first days” of January 1841, noting that she was studying with the tenor Gilbert-Louis Duprez and had more to learn from him before appearing in public.⁸

Heinefetter did appear early in January, but if anything her success only added to the pressure Pillet put on her. At some point in the first half of March, he seems to have accused her of not attending enough rehearsals or learning enough roles, as she wrote on March 15 that she knew the part of Elvira (in Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*) and did not need any more rehearsals. She added that she had recently sung Rachel (in *La Juive*), Valentine (in Meyerbeer’s *Les Huguenots*), and Alice (in Meyerbeer’s *Robert the Devil*) and promised to rehearse *Don Giovanni* the next day. She concluded the letter with a plea for the director to stop being displeased at her.⁹ The question of preparation time emerged again on May 7 when Heinefetter complained to Pillet that she was not being given enough time to study the roles he expected her to sing.¹⁰

In addition to disputes over the amount of time it would take to learn her roles, Heinefetter’s file reveals a running quarrel over her physical condition. On November 9, 1840, the diva wrote Pillet that “my indisposition which makes it impossible to sing forces me to inform you that I will not be able to appear at tomorrow’s performance.”¹¹ Later that month she complained about a “légère indisposition”.¹² On January 21, 1841, she claimed, without elaborating, to be “forced to stay in bed”.¹³ Four days later she wrote, “Monsieur, I strongly regret being forced to inform you that an indisposition prevents me from singing Friday. I hope I can assure you that I will be able to do so next Monday. Please accept my very sincere apologies.”¹⁴ On March 15, she alluded to health problems when she wrote that “the doctor” would let her “go out tomorrow”.¹⁵ On May 7, she requested an early summer vacation, claiming, “[M]y doctors (*mes médecins*) are urging me in the interest of my health to breathe the air of the country.”¹⁶

At times Heinefetter alluded to the effect her menstrual cycle had on her con-

7. Catinka Heinefetter to Léon Pillet, Director of the Académie Royale de la Musique, 26 October 1840. “Heinefetter”, AJ 13 194, Archives Nationales, Paris.

8. Heinefetter to Pillet, [letter undated but marked “reçu” November 20 1840]. “Heinefetter”, AJ 13 194, Archives Nationales, Paris. (Further references to correspondence in this dossier will cite sender, recipient, and date only.)

9. Heinefetter to Pillet, 15 March 1841.

10. Heinefetter to Pillet, 7 May 1841.

11. Heinefetter to Pillet, 9 November 1840.

12. Heinefetter to Pillet, [letter undated but marked “reçu” November 20, 1840].

13. Heinefetter to Pillet, 21 January 1841.

14. Heinefetter to Pillet, 25 January 1841.

15. Heinefetter to Pillet, 15 March 1841.

16. Heinefetter to Pillet, 26 May 1841.

dition and her ability to sing. On February 9, 1841, she wrote, "Monsieur, it is necessary to inform you with great regret that a circumstance to which a woman is subject has just announced itself unexpectedly and to my great discontent[;] it will therefore be impossible for me to sing tomorrow."¹⁷ On March 3, she simply announced that she would "not be able to sing between the seventh and the tenth[;] it's not a favorable time at all."¹⁸ Was she being a *prima donna* in the proverbial as well as literal sense of the term? Not necessarily. Medical scientists have confirmed that menstruation can provoke dysphonia, a voice disorder characterized by hoarseness or constriction of the larynx.¹⁹ Pillet must have been aware of this problem, anecdotally if not scientifically, and if Heinefetter had "her" doctors, the Academy had its own. Nearly a quarter of the letters in Heinefetter's dossier are from doctors, all but one reporting to Pillet.

Specifically, on November 10, 1840, in response to Heinefetter's claim of "indisposition", Pillet received a report from a physician who "according to your invitation" had examined the singer that morning and found "very light redness" in her throat which constituted "more of a discomfort (*une gêne*) than an impossibility of singing." He predicted that Heinefetter would be singing again in two or three days.²⁰ She must have complained about her health again, however, since just four days later, the "doctors (*médecins*) of the Académie Royale de Musique" reported that they had visited her at her home "according to the invitation of M. Le Directeur" and "examined her with the most scrupulous attention." They wrote that "there is in Mad[emoiselle] Heinefetter no appreciable symptom of the organs that could make it impossible for her to sing." They added, however, that Heinefetter was "near her menstrual period", which "could deprive her of some of the advantages of her voice."²¹ The doctors were clearly no strangers to menstrual dysphonia. A report later that month informed the director that the examining physician found Heinefetter "in a state of perfect health" and reported that she "even declared to me that she did not have any indisposition." She did add, however, according to the doctor, that she was in the midst of her menstrual period and that her voice would be "veiled"

17. Heinefetter to Pillet, 9 February 1841.

18. Heinefetter to Pillet, 3 March 1841.

19. "The female larynx is . . . exposed to hormonal fluctuations, and changes in the voice during the premenstrual period do occur and can be troublesome for singers." Françoise P. Chagnon, "Hoarseness and Voice Change", in *Oxford Textbook of Primary Medical Care*, ed. Roger Jones et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), vol. 2, 722. See also Maree Carol Ryan, "Effects of Premenstrual Symptoms on Young Female Singers", MA thesis, Sydney Conservatorium of Music, University of Sydney, 2007. <http://hdl.handle.net/2123/1432>, accessed 4 February 2009.

20. Sibill Scandy Camille Soroy Couche-Dugera [doctor for the Académie Royale de la Musique] to Pillet, 10 November 1840.

21. "Les médecins de l'Académie Royale de Musique" to Pillet, 14 November 1840.

(*voilée*) as a result for the next four or five days. In other words, she would not be able to sing.²²

On January 21, 1841, in response to the singer's claim that she would be "forced to stay in bed" for several days, Pillet again sent the doctor, who responded later in the day that "Mad[emois]elle Heinefetter was "in bed" and complaining of "stomach-aches (*des coliques*) caused by the recurrence of her period (*règles*).” She was afraid, the doctor added, that going out in the January weather would be "harmful to her health.” He concluded by noting that the singer did not have an accelerated pulse and, crucial for an assessment of her ability to sing, that she did not have any complaints regarding her throat or "vocal organs".²³

Once again, on April 3, 1841, one of the Academy's doctors wrote Pillet about his examination of the singer. Heinefetter had told the doctor that she was in the midst of her "monthly period" (*époque mensuelle*) and that it was "impossible for her to sing." The doctor continued, "This periodic revolution, she says, causes her tremors that she cannot overcome, the blood rushes easily to her head and causes dizziness. A month ago Mad[emois]elle Heinefetter sang *La Juive* in such a state, and she says she was sick for eight days afterwards as a result of that attempt." He concluded, "The facts offered by Mad[emois]elle Heinefetter are probably quite true, but they cannot be proved by a doctor."²⁴

An unsigned letter from March 13 [probably 1842] reports a visit by an Academy doctor to Heinefetter's residence in which the patient was "in bed and affected by laryngeal angina". The physician "hope[d] ... that this indisposition" would not last "more than a few days" and promised to examine her again the next day and inform Pillet about her condition.²⁵ The last letter from an Academy doctor to Pillet is from March 29, 1842, when a physician who had gone to Heinefetter's residence "according to the invitation of Monsieur the Director" did not find the singer at home.²⁶ It is perhaps for this reason that yet another medical affidavit is in the singer's file. On April 2, a Doctor Trigeu "certifie[d]" that "M[ademois]elle Catinka Heinefetter has been suffering from a bronchial irritation which has kept her in her room for this time." Trigeu does not appear in any of the other correspondence, and he does not say anything about working for the Academy or visiting Heinefetter at the request of the director. He simply identifies himself as a "doctor in med-

22. Couche-Dugera to Pillet, 21 November 1840.

23. Couche-Dugera to Pillet, 21 January 1841.

24. Couche-Dugera to Pillet, 3 April 1841.

25. Unsigned letter from a doctor for the Académie Royale de Musique to Pillet, 13 March [no year]. I believe this letter is from 1842, in part because it is in the same file folder as other letters from Spring 1842, but also because on March 11, 1841, Heinefetter's principal worry was doubling for Rosine Stoltz, and she does not mention anything about a sore throat in that letter or in the one she wrote on March 15, 1841.

26. Couche-Dugera to Pillet, 29 March 1842.

icine at the faculty of Paris”, and appears to be Heinefetter’s defense against the director’s suspicions about the reality of her indispositions.²⁷

Whether she was requesting more time to prepare her roles or delaying performances for health reasons, Heinefetter seems to have enjoyed considerable control over her schedule, despite the director’s attempted interventions. In addition, her file reveals a concern on her part over audience reception. On April 4, 1841, she wrote to Pillet, “In exchange for my complaisance for the interests of the administration, I should obtain some applause from the *claque* that has up to this point remained inactive for me.”²⁸ On another occasion Heinefetter expressed concern about her *claque*, i.e., the spectators who were paid (or at least given free tickets) in exchange for applauding enthusiastically. In an undated letter to Pillet, she verified that she was to receive eighty free tickets for a concert.²⁹ Some of these tickets may have been for family and friends, but it is likely that others were for a *claque*. Her brother, who according to Heinefetter lived “in Paris with me”, may have helped round up supporters; as early as January 26, 1841, she requested an “entrée permanente” to the opera for him.³⁰

Furthermore, Heinefetter was concerned about comparisons between herself and other singers. In a letter of March 11, 1841, Heinefetter complained that she had been assigned to double for Rosine Stoltz, who was five or six years her senior, in *Der Freischütz*. This was not the first time she had been required to double for another singer. As she indicated in her letter, she had submitted to this task several times before, but now she felt “very humiliated” by the assignment and wrote, “I would prefer to break or terminate my contract than to be used in this manner.”³¹ I cannot determine whether Pillet gave in to this threat, but in any event Heinefetter remained at the Opera for more than a year afterward.

In all, the records of Catinka Heinefetter’s tenure at the Paris Opera reveal a young woman who tested the limits of her director’s malleability, who was not shy about making requests and launching complaints, and who understood her value to the institution for which she worked. But what, if anything, is *Jewish* about her story? To begin with, was Gautier correct in reporting that Heinefetter was a *juive*? This is impossible to determine with certainty, but the evidence suggests a strong probability that the singer was Jewish. In addition to Gautier’s attribution, there is an article on Catinka’s sister Clara Heinefetter (later Stöckl-Heinefetter) in the *Jüdischer Plutarch*, a “biographical lexicon of the most famous men and women of Je-

27. Trigeu to Pillet, 2 April 1842.

28. Heinefetter to Pillet, 4 April 1841.

29. Heinefetter to Pillet, undated.

30. Heinefetter to Pillet, 26 January 1841.

31. Heinefetter to Pillet, 11 March 1841.

wish origin", which appeared in Vienna in 1848.³² As a German-language book focusing on the Habsburg Empire, it seems unlikely that the *Jüdischer Plutarch* would have been influenced by Gautier's Parisian newspaper article of 1841 on the singer's sister. Later sources such as the *Jewish Encyclopedia* (1906-7) and the German-language *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (1928-33) also listed the Heinefetter sisters, as did the anti-Semitic agitator Theodor Fritsch in his *Handbuch der Judenfrage* (1933 edition).³³ Thus if they were not Jewish, they were identified as such by friend and foe over the course of several generations.

Another document is worth examining when considering the question of Catinka Heinefetter's Jewishness. On January 7, 1841, the singer wrote to Gautier, "Monsieur, it is with true regret that I see myself forced to postpone the visit that I meant to have the advantage of paying you one of these days. But the bad weather has forced me to take precautions which are all the greater since my debuts have not ended; and it is after this period [of the debuts] that I will be able to fulfill this duty [of meeting you], whatever the weather."³⁴ According to the editor of Gautier's correspondence, Heinefetter "could have read the review of her debut in the newspaper of T[héophile] G[autier] that morning" before writing to the author. It seems practically certain that her letter was a reaction to the review, since no other letters between Heinefetter and Gautier are known to have been written, and it would be highly coincidental if Heinefetter had written this single letter before (or without) having read Gautier's review. The letter suggests that the singer was displeased with the review, hence the "postponement" of a meeting that no one had actually scheduled. Any number of elements of the review might have provoked the cold response: Gautier's focus on the singer's large hands (and suspected big feet), his judgment regarding her "capricious and inconstant" voice, or his remarks about her Jewishness and Jewish fans. Revealingly, however, she did not contradict him on any of his points. Perhaps she did have large hands and feet. Perhaps she knew she had to work on her voice. (Gautier was not alone in criticizing her singing. Berlioz judged Catinka Heinefetter similarly.³⁵) And perhaps it went without saying that she was Jewish.

32. *Jüdischer Plutarch; oder biographisches Lexicon der markantesten Männer und Frauen jüdischer Abkunft, (aller Stände, Zeiten und Länder) mit besonderer Rücksicht auf das österreichische Kaiserthum. Von mehreren jüdischen und nichtjüdischen, in- und ausländischen Schriftstellern* (Vienna, 1848), 76-85.

33. *Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York, 1906-7), s.v. "Heinefetter, Klara (Madame Stöckl)", and "Heinefetter, Sabine"; *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Berlin, 1928-33), s.v. "Heinefetter"; and Theodor Fritsch, *Handbuch der Judenfrage: Die wichtigsten Tatsachen zur Beurteilung des jüdischen Volkes* (Leipzig: Hammer-Verlag, 1933), 333. There is no reference to the Heinefetter sisters in the 1907 edition of the *Handbuch*.

34. Catinka Heinefetter to Théophile Gautier, [January 7, 1841], in Gautier, *Correspondance générale*, ed. Claudine Lacoste-Veysseyre (Geneva: Droz, 1985), vol. 1, no. 233, 232.

35. Hector Berlioz, "Fräulein Heinefetter als Debütantin in der 'Jüdin' [von Halévy]", *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 14, no. 19 (5 March 1841), 76-77.

Indeed, there is reason to believe that being Jewish (or at least being reputedly Jewish) helped rather than hindered Heinefetter's career. Specifically, the stereotypical category of the *belle juive* helped to constitute Heinefetter as physically attractive. This cliché was the product of centuries of cultural work. From Shylock's daughter Jessica in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* to Isaac's daughter Rebecca in Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* (a bestseller in France as well as the English-speaking world), Jewish women and girls in European culture had long been represented as beautiful.³⁶ Indeed, the opera *La Juive*, which had premiered in 1835, was only the latest manifestation of a longstanding European taste for representations of Jewish women. The product of a Jewish composer, Fromental Halévy (1799-1862), and a Gentile librettist, Eugène Scribe (1791-1861), *La Juive* was one of the most popular operas of nineteenth-century France. It kept the Paris Opera afloat during hard times and effectively subsidized the company's flops.³⁷ The lure of the exotic female characterized orientalist fantasies of varying types and did not automatically involve Jewish women. Yet unlike the alluring Arab, Turkish, or Persian women of popular literature and painting, actual Jewish women were available to sing on European stages.³⁸ The stereotype of the *belle juive* rendered them beautiful almost by definition.

It was important for female opera singers to be beautiful. One popular illustrated book of 1845, edited by Gautier and other critics, bore the title *Les beautés de l'opéra*. The publication featured full-page prints of ten "beauties" who had starred in operas or ballets.³⁹ *Prime donne* were prized mistresses of fashionable men who showered them with expensive gifts and acted as informal but influential publicity agents. Numerous men vied for Heinefetter herself. Less than two weeks after her debut, a lieutenant-general in the artillery requested permission from Pillet to have the singer in his "salon ... at night" on January 23, 1841. The officer concluded his request frankly with advance "thanks for being so obliging in acceding to my desires."⁴⁰ While there is no way of knowing whether any intimacy ensued between

36. On the image of the "Jewess" in European literature, see Luce A. Klein, *Portrait de la Juive dans la littérature française* (Paris: Nizet, 1970); Florian Krobb, *Die schöne Jüdin: jüdische Frauengestalten in der deutschsprachigen Erzählliteratur vom 17. Jahrhundert bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1993); and Nadia Valman, *The Jewess in Nineteenth-Century British Literary Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

37. Diana Hallman, *The French Grand Opera La Juive (1835): A Socio-Historical Study* (PhD dissertation, City University of New York, 1995), 1-4.

38. On the role of orientalism in paintings of Jewish women, see Carol Ockman, "'Two Large Eyebrows à l'Orientale': Ethnic Stereotyping in Ingres's *Baronne De Rothschild*", *Art History* 14 (December 1991), 521-39. Marie Lathers has shown that Jewish women worked as artists' models in nineteenth-century Paris. Marie Lathers, "Posing the 'Belle Juive': Jewish Models in 19th-Century Paris", *Woman's Art Journal* 21 (Spring-Summer 2000), 27-32.

39. Théophile Gautier, Jules Gabriel Janin, and Philarète Chasles, eds., *Les beautés de l'opéra, ou, Chefs-d'oeuvre lyriques* (Paris, 1845).

40. Lt. Gen. Bonet Duchannes [sp?] to Pillet, 16 January 1841. Whether the officer's "desires" were ful-

the singer and the soldier, Heinefetter definitely had lovers subsequently. Indeed, in what became a *cause célèbre*, in September 1842 two of Heinefetter's lovers engaged in a duel in Brussels in which one rival killed the other.⁴¹

As a beautiful woman, Heinefetter was valuable to the Paris Opera. As a *belle juive*, she was more valuable still. In part, her desirability stemmed from the success of one particular opera, *La Juive*, though one could just as easily argue that Heinefetter's Jewishness fueled the success of Halévy's opera. It is not an accident that the director gave Heinefetter the role of Rachel for her debut. Gautier was no doubt not the only observer to find a *juive* convincing in the title role of *La Juive*. It is also not an accident that the first star of *La Juive* in 1835 was a woman reputed to be Jewish, Cornélie Falcon. Let us recall Gautier's claim: "[s]ince Mademoiselle [Cornélie] Falcon, no one has represented the beautiful Jewess Rachel with a more satisfying and realistic physical appearance, and this for the excellent reason that Mademoiselle Heinefetter is a Jewess herself and very beautiful." Just two months later, Gautier reaffirmed Falcon's Jewishness, writing of the singer, who had given a recital in Paris, "She is as beautiful as ever. There are still the large, passionately dark eyes, the warm Jewish pallor (*la chaude pâleur juive*) ... the abundant and superb hair..."⁴² Moreover, in 1842, according to the *Archives Israélites*, the principal Jewish periodical of the day, "everyone knows that M. Halévy, her [Falcon's] coreligionist, wrote the role of Rachel, of *La Juive*, for this famous *cantatrice*." And twenty years later, in an obituary for Halévy, readers were reminded that *La Juive* was a "Jewish subject, written by a Jew and having a Jewess as the first interpreter of its main role."⁴³

Other women whom contemporaries identified as Jewish sang the role of Rachel. Claire-Célestine Nathan-Treillet (1815-73) debuted in *La Juive* on May 24, 1839. In 1842, the *Archives Israélites* boasted of her "uncontested" reputation, though Berlioz complained in a letter to his father that the singer was "très médiocre" and

filled is unknown, though two days before the rendezvous, according to the Academy doctors, Heinefetter was suffering from menstrual pain. Couche-Dugera to Pillet, 21 January 1841.

41. "Bruxelles, appartements de Kathinka Heinefetter: meurtre de Sirey par Caumartin", in *La Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* 9, no. 48 (November 27, 1842), 471; "Madlle. Cathinka Heinefetter [Witness to a Fatal Stabbing]", in *The Musical World* 17, no. 51, [December 22,] 1842, 410-11; "A Romance of Musical Life", in *The Musical Examiner*, August 26, 1843, 317-20; *Affaire Caumartin. Accusation d'homicide volontaire sur la personne d'Aimé Sirey* [extract from the journal *Observateur des tribunaux* 9] (Paris, 1843); *Der Process Caumartin - Sirey - Heinefetter* (Leipzig, 1843); and Armand Fouquier, *Causes célèbres de tous les peuples* (Paris, 1859), vol. 2, no. 39, 1-20.
42. Théophile Gautier, "18 mars. Porte-Saint-Martin", in *Histoire de l'art dramatique en France depuis vingt-cinq ans* (Paris, 1859), vol. 2, 40.
43. *Archives Israélites* 3 (1842): 234-36; and vol. 23 (1862): 188. On Falcon's Jewishness, see also Cormac Newark, "Ceremony, Celebration, and Spectacle in *La Juive*", in *Reading Critics Reading: Opera and Ballet Criticism in France from the Revolution to 1848*, ed. Roger Parker and Mary Ann Smart (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 162.

insisted, using a pejorative for the Jewish community, that she owed her fame to “la Juiverie”.⁴⁴ When she died in 1873, the Belgian periodical *Le Guide Musical* reported that she had been born “to Israelite parents”.⁴⁵ The *Archives Israélites* also claimed Elise Julian Van Gelder, who in 1841 alternated with Heinefetter in the principal role of *La Juive*, as a member of the community. Other Jewish women who sang the role of Rachel were Auguste Iffla, who performed at the Bordeaux Opera, and Palmyre Wertheimber, who starred at the Paris Opera in the 1850s.⁴⁶ Strikingly, in the decade following the premiere of *La Juive*, it appears that one of the few Rachels in the Paris Opera who was *not* Jewish was Rosine Stoltz. According to musicologist Mary Ann Smart, however, Stoltz “is said to have fabricated a Jewish background for herself.”⁴⁷ It is possible that the singer envied her colleagues’ (and competitors’) Jewishness and therefore appropriated this identity for herself.

Of course, *La Juive* was not the only opera mounted in July Monarchy Paris, though it was arguably the most successful. Factors beyond the verisimilitude of a Jewish Rachel account for the striking number of female Jewish opera stars. Specifically, in the field of music in the nineteenth century, Jews had quickly found a niche in the larger gentile society.⁴⁸ Among composers, the most famous examples were Halévy and Meyerbeer, in whose operas Jewish women were frequently cast. Moreover, the field of theatrical performance, including operatic performance, furnished numerous opportunities for Jews. The stage served as a ready outlet for Jewish talent in part because it was already a socially suspect place and therefore not as fiercely guarded by gentiles as other professions. Indeed, during the French Revolution the same legislative body that emancipated the Jews debated the national status of actors, whose profession enjoyed a dubious reputation and who were only emancipated after debate.⁴⁹

Paradoxically, the Jewish community itself seems to have been ambivalent about

44. Hector Berlioz, *Correspondance générale*, ed. Pierre Citron (Paris: Flammarion, 1972), vol. 2, 553, cited in Jean-Louis Tamvaco, *Les cancans de l'Opéra: Le journal d'une habilleuse 1836-1848* (Paris: CNRS Editions 2000), vol. 2, 1128n; and *Archives Israélites* 3 (1842): 234-36.

45. “Necrologie”, *Le Guide musical: Revue hebdomadaire des nouvelles musicales de la Belgique et de l'étranger*, August 21-28, 1873. According to a recent biographer of Halévy, Nathan-Treillet “like Mlle. Falcon was Jewish”. Ruth Jordan, *Fromental Halévy: His Life and Music* (London: Kahn & Averill 1994), 69.

46. On Iffla and Van Gelder, see *Archives Israélites* 3 (1842): 234-36. On Wertheimber, see vol. 12 (1851): 445 and vol. 16 (1855): 237. On Wertheimber's Jewishness, see also Nahida Ruth Lazarus, *Das jüdische Weib* (Berlin, 1896), 260.

47. Mary Ann Smart, “The Lost Voice of Rosine Stoltz”, in *Cambridge Opera Journal* 6 (March 1994): 37n.

48. Sander L. Gilman, “Are Jews Musical? Historical Notes on the Question of Jewish Musical Modernism and Nationalism”, *Modern Judaism* 28 (October 2008): 239-56.

49. See my *Obstinate Hebrews: Representations of Jews in France, 1715-1815* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 161-62.

female theater and opera stars. The editors of the *Archives Israélites* reported on the successes of fellow Jews in all kinds of endeavors, including theatrical and musical achievements. But they scrutinized the morality and religiosity of Jewish stars. Thus their first article about the enormously successful actress Rachel Félix begins by noting with distaste that one of her performances at the Théâtre Français in 1840 took place on Yom Kippur.⁵⁰ The following year Mademoiselle Rachel was back in favor because she took part in the Rosh Hashanah services at the principal Parisian synagogue, where “her presence made a great impression”.⁵¹ In 1843, the editors criticized the Jewish piano virtuoso Ignaz Moscheles for holding a musical *soirée* in his home on Yom Kippur, and they praised Rachel for refusing to perform there.⁵² That same year they proudly reported that Rachel gave charity to a poor Jewish family in Lyon.⁵³

Heinefetter is absent from the pages of the *Archives Israélites*, a gap that might be explained by the embarrassment of the much-publicized scandal surrounding her dueling lovers in 1842. Still, in 1840 and 1841 the singer suggested on more than one occasion that she had influential Jewish friends. For example, in her first letter to Pillet, while requesting a postponement of her debut, Catinka added that Baron Solomon de Rothschild could vouch for the understanding she had with Duponchel, the production manager, about when she would be ready to go on stage. Whether she was bluffing or not, few names could have been more intimidating in Paris in 1840 than that of the famous Jewish banking family.⁵⁴ As a “Jewess”, Heinefetter may have felt that her richest coreligionist was a natural ally in her contest with her director. Similarly, when requesting her *claque*, she informed Pillet that “Monsieur Halévy” had assured her that she would have many enthusiastic fans.⁵⁵ Of course, Halévy was the composer of *La Juive*, but he was also a prominent member of the Jewish community. A young Jewish woman new to Paris might easily have imagined the eminent Jewish man to be a source of support, especially as he shared her professional interests, and dropping his name might have been designed to give the director the impression that he was negotiating with an entire people, not simply Catinka Heinefetter. Such patronage would not have been unusual. The previous year, Adolphe Crémieux, the prominent Jewish lawyer and statesman, had sent a letter to Pillet requesting more time for his coreligionist Mlle. Nathan-Treillet (also eventually a Rachel in *La Juive*) to prepare for her debut.⁵⁶

50. *Archives Israélites* 1 (1840): 564-65.

51. *Archives Israélites* 2 (1841): 586.

52. *Archives Israélites* 4 (1843): 657.

53. *Archives Israélites* 4 (1843): 458.

54. Heinefetter to Pillet, 26 October 1840.

55. Heinefetter to Pillet, undated.

56. Adolphe Crémieux to Charles Duponchel, 11 May [1839], in “Treilhet-Nathan [sic] (Mad)”, AJ 13 195, Archives Nationales, Paris.

Similarly, on January 26, 1841, Heinefetter asked Pillet to “facilitate my entry” to the theater in Paris where Rachel Félix was performing the title role in *Marie Stuart* (by Pierre Le Brun). The performance was that same day, but Heinefetter reasoned that “you will think, as I do, Monsieur, that there will be good lessons for me to take in studying this charming tragedienne.” While there is no doubt that Heinefetter wanted to see the great Mlle. Rachel on stage, she may also have felt an identification with a fellow “Jewess”, and she may have been trying to remind Pillet of the immense success of one female Jewish performer and the possibility that he had a Rachel of his own. After all, Heinefetter sang the role of the *belle juive* Rachel.⁵⁷

Even if Gautier and others were wrong to identify Heinefetter as Jewish and the singer herself was simply calculating her advantage when she refrained from denying the writer’s claim, her proximity to Jewish composers and performers and the inescapable association of her name to Rachels both fictional and real made her Jewish in the eyes of her spectators, and this perception took on a reality of its own. It influenced Gautier’s interpretation of her cultural meaning. It increased Heinefetter’s value to culture brokers such as Pillet. It situated the diva in a small but highly visible and privileged sorority of Jewish opera stars, and it reinforced the impression that theater and music were particularly Jewish vocations.

57. Heinefetter to Pillet, 26 January 1841.